

VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #1832/01 1591926  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 081926Z JUN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9098  
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0096  
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA PRIORITY 3196  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0246  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0249  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 0160  
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUCNFB/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 001832

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2019  
TAGS: [EAID](#) [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [MX](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: LESSONS LEARNED FROM PLAN COLOMBIA

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION. I asked my Country Team to distill our combined Colombia experience into a cable offering a selection of lessons learned that may be of use to our colleagues in Mexico and other countries confronting escalating drug trafficking and related violence. This is not an exhaustive list. Our goal is to share ideas that have served us well in Colombia. We think that some of these ideas might apply elsewhere. Narcotrafficking poses similar threats--violence, corruption, and organized crime--and Colombia, despite many advances, remains a critical link in the chain of problems leading to the United States. Still, Colombia also shows how some of those problems can be solved.  
END SUMMARY.

MEXICO IS NOT COLOMBIA

-----  
¶2. (C) We recognize that Colombia's situation is far different from that of Mexico, Guatemala, Afghanistan, etc. Colombia has a unique history of violence independent of the drug trade. Colombia's drug problem is tied up in a long-term insurgency involving multiple actors. Colombia is primarily a drug (coca/cocaine) producing country, and has unique geographical conditions. Colombian institutions, legal regimes, and solutions cannot be superimposed onto other, different systems. In short, Colombia, Mexico and other countries represent very different situations, cultures, and problem sets--and will require distinct solutions.

STILL, SOME LESSONS MAY RESONATE

-----  
¶3. (C) Still, narcotrafficking poses similar challenges--violence, corruption, and organized crime--everywhere, and big U.S. programs generate some of the same concerns and solutions. Colombia's situation is inextricably linked to Mexico and other drug transit countries, and its successes and failures continue to impact the entire chain into the United States. Some of the hard lessons learned in Colombia by more than forty U.S. Departments and Agencies over ten years and \$6.5 billion could be instructive. We offer, in no particular order, the following "top twelve" lessons learned for your consideration.

--SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT PRESENCE. Nothing can happen without security. Without it, citizens cannot make

complaints, police cannot arrest, prosecutors cannot prosecute, witnesses cannot testify, criminals will not remain in jail. Without it, the licit economy will stagnate and the problem will get worse. None of our programs--not from State, USAID, DoJ, DoD, etc--have succeeded without basic security. After basic security is established, an effective Government presence is needed to build on those gains. In Colombia, we have identified five key zones where we have begun to help the GOC employ consolidated civilian (education, health care and development) as well as military means to build state legitimacy in secured areas.

--TRAINING AND FACILITIES. In addition to long-term training and the importance of the train-the trainer exercises, training infrastructure is needed. To meet the goal of developing permanent capacities, the locals needed facilities that outlasted U.S. programs. Once the U.S. trainers have left and a country has "graduated" from a program, it will need facilities to carry on.

--HUMAN RIGHTS AND VETTING. Human rights violations from the bad guys and Government are inevitable, and military involvement in law enforcement adds layers of complexity. The military needs clear rules of engagement consistent with domestic and international law. Military criminal justice systems are sometimes not up to the job of transparently investigating abuses. In Colombia, the civilian system investigates and prosecutes military abuses. As recent scandals have shown, changing military culture and imposing civilian oversight are long-term endeavors. The Government needs institutions to investigate abuse claims (including victims of the state), and those institutions need resources. It is best for international organizations, civil society, and the Government to directly coordinate early to come up with transparent descriptions of the problems and solutions. Finally, computer databases and full-time cleared staff are needed to manage human rights vetting and maintain accurate historic information on who can and cannot receive U.S. assistance in line with U.S. law--this is a full time job.

--PROTECTION PROGRAMS AND EXTRADITION. Judges, prosecutors, and police cannot do their jobs if they or their families are at risk, and witnesses will not testify. Protection of these key players has helped Colombia turn a corner in prosecuting narco-traffickers, making bodyguards and armored vehicles costly, but unavoidable, expenses.

--EXTRADITION. Extradition of high-value or high-risk defendants is key, as corruption of local officials (police, judicial, penal) can prevent local institutions from punishing offenders. The threat of extradition and greater certainty of punishment represents a powerful tool to compel defendants to turn on their associates or superiors and help dismantle their organizations.

--EMBEDDING U.S. EXPERTS. Sovereignty-conscious host Governments will resist close operating relationships with us. Embedding personnel (even in small numbers) in host country institutions provides subtle early leverage over U.S. assistance programs. Technical experts, if possible using development of the highly effective judicial intercept program, provide the perfect opportunity.

--REGIONAL COOPERATION AND TRAINING. It's all one drug trade. Regional cooperation (and operations) can have a multiplier effect. Given the need for training facilities, international regional training centers can save money and build trust and cooperation. Colombia has trained personnel from more than a dozen other countries--this represented real bang for the U.S. buck, and has paid off with enhanced regional cooperation.

--INTELLIGENCE SHARING. Little will happen without it. After years of cooperation, problems remain in Colombia, but the perfect should not become the enemy of the good on intelligence sharing. Strong counter-intelligence capabilities are also required to combat infiltration of

institutions and build the confidence needed for successful sharing.

--JOINTNESS. Joint operations combining expertise and function streamline success. It has taken years for the Colombian Police and Military (not to mention different services or units within the military) to share information and work together, or to develop systems to utilize limited aviation assets across services. It took even longer for the military to allow civilian investigators and prosecutors to embed to ease investigations of bad guys (and human rights violations). The introduction and normalization of jointness, to the extent possible, has facilitated success in Colombia across the board.

--REINTEGRATION. It is never too early to start thinking about what to do if large numbers of prisoners (tens of [xNpyQQY/QzfdQ~thousands) are captured, or if entire groups of bad guys give themselves up under pressure. Secure prisons, especially for high-value prisoners facing extradition, are costly and require long lead times. Those who surrender or serve their time need some hope of a licit future in order to keep them out of trouble, as the GOC's ongoing, but improving, problems with former-demobilized paramilitary fighters and narcotraffickers show.

--INTEGRATION AND SEQUENCING. Embassy Bogota found that it was absolutely critical to assist the GOC to develop an integrated and sequenced plan to help take back communities from narcotraffickers. While security is paramount, governments often lack a plan on what to do next. Rebuilding the communities and creating confidence in local institutions that were formerly controlled by narco groups is absolutely key. Elements that should be considered include protecting children and other vulnerable groups, strengthening local organizations, and increasing access to services and job creation programs. An integrated, sequenced approach involving all of the necessary government institutions ensures a faster recovery for communities affected by the narcos, and leaves it less vulnerable to other narco groups that may try to return.

--NATIONALIZATION. U.S. assistance will wind down and eventually end. We have discovered that early thinking about how to design a critical path method for complex integrated programs to be turned over ("nationalized") once the money starts winding down really pays off and gives you some control of your programs.

14. (SBU) Finally, all of these things--planning, implementation, adjustment, problem solving--require lots of resources and personnel. On an average day, Embassy Bogota has approximately 4,500 people (a combination of permanent and TDY U.S. personnel, military, local staff, and contractors) on the job. This post trebled in size in a few short years, and it took us years to properly assimilate this growth, placing severe strains on the administrative/ICASS platform. The office space, housing, motorpool, and other administrative challenges have been immense and early planning with OBO, HR, etc has served us well.

15. (U) Some of the aforementioned observations and lessons may be obvious, some not. We hope that some will be of utility, or perhaps stimulate ideas that better fit your situation. We stand ready to consult and/or assist as you move forward.

Brownfield